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Cover art: "Sprouts" Issue art: "Onion Tears" Artwork courtesy of [Tess Beauchamp-Rheault](#). Tess Beauchamp-Rheault is a painter out of Portland, OR. Her work investigates gender, race and the physiological state through interior spaces. She received her bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from Oregon College of Art and Craft where she was a Gamblin Paint Awardee and received the Lemelson Scholarship.

DONNA

Austyn Wohlers

Standing here you get such a nice view of the future, always cooling, always colder and a little steelier. The future and the bay, tasting like the sea with its gentle green waves, California wildflowers, greenish-blue plexiglass buildings which reflect the gardens and the light. Anna is walking into one. She is not the kind of woman to pause before the door, to close her eyes and think: okay, I'll walk like this, stiff-hipped, really, don't sway your hips, straight up to the fruit and the coffee, where I'll make myself a little plate, walking quickly, then, over to my seat... now she is somebody who people fetch coffee for. She strives for goodness and for excellence, always. She believes in the world and its processes.

Life passes through her like a pleasant shadow. She moves like a cloud of fairy dust, almost immaterially. Vacant and neutral, she enters the boardroom. Strange how men react when you act the mother, the teacher, the nun, receiving them with a nod and a smile, with a blankness almost like a clear white light. Still they think about Anna's soft hair, feathery brown. How it probably smells like hazelnut, vanilla, butterscotch... She smooths her skirt once before sitting down. Walter brings her a cup of hot coffee. She looks at him with the restrained friendliness of an executive, with a warmth that bubbles up softly from beneath a calm and glassy lake.

"Thanks, Walter," she says.

Walter is a little odd but Anna likes him anyway. He is a married man with birdish bones. He takes a seat beside her, smiling, and tells her about how he took his wife, Glenda, out to the crab place Anna had mentioned the other night, and how fantastic it was, and what a nice time they had.

"I'm glad to hear that, Walter," says Anna. "How is she doing?"

"She's alright," says Walter. He is noticing Anna's new brown coat, how she slides her slender fingers into its pockets when she feels uncomfortable. "She's..."

The presenter clears his throat. He is an engineer with curly hair, thick and coppery, with chicken pox scars and dark hawkish eyes which dart around at things. Anna looks over at him, slow and pleasant. He is smiling at her. Behind him two men wheel out some huge and boxlike object hidden beneath blankets, red or pink, coral. The color of salmon, Anna thinks, or of love.

“Hi,” he says. “Hey, everybody, all right.”

He looks pale. His voice quivers. Anna is patient with people like this. She has known solitude but never shyness, and finds it beautiful that people are compelled to do things they find difficult. She tries to look at him with encouragement.

“Some of you may have already heard about our latest project. Well, I mean, product...” He smiles involuntarily. People joke and murmur. “We wanted to show you all a beta version before unveiling her to the rest of the company. Get some feedback, some commentary...”

He fingers the edge of the blanket, just for a moment, twirling it. He yanks it away. Anna sees a silver woman, gleaming and beautiful, the perfect circle of her mouth, and behind her a screen flashing, the engineer laughing and promising everybody that her flesh will eventually be golden-brown, or pale, black, whatever you want, soft silicone flesh grated onto her metal body, but for now Anna can see her wires, red and blue, her veins. The engineer says something about the physical and the emotional, she can't quite hear, something about love on both a physical and an emotional level, and that her hair is shampooable, her long white hair which springs from her silver head, straight and starlit, and how lovely would it be, fellas, to feel that sweet hair on your stomach while she... and you can even cut and style it, yeah, she's completely customizable, down to freckles on her nose, and somebody mentions *Her*, except this time you can finally get her to look like Scarlett Johansson, heh-heh. I'd love to sculpt that metal ass, to make it look more like a peach or like two sparkling cherries. I'd love to pull her panties down over those cold iron legs, to hold her hair in my fist. You can make her look just like your girlfriend (everyone is laughing) or maybe your ex-girlfriend, or even your insufferable mother-in-law, which gets a chuckle out of Walter, the female service droid, the female body, the woman as an amalgamation of sensations, and the engineer, confident now, standing up straight and masculine, he pulls out a little white remote, clicks idly through some actions. Somebody doesn't like the way she blinks, says it's uncanny, but don't worry, the eyes are customizable as well, twin violets like Elizabeth Taylor, and the whole time Anna watching her twitch and spasm over a wooden chair.

* * *

Strawberries. She smells like strawberries. The world is a dark orb glowing pink, the sun now setting, the fog of dusk descending and eating the light which shimmers against the valley towers, the fractals. Anna enters once again, luminous. Walter is waiting for her in the lobby. They act out a little fiction for security, not that they need to, a little *thanks for meeting me here this late*, a fiction and a hug, in which Walter, embracing her, inhales, deeply, he takes a deep breath of Anna's soft brown hair, which decisively (he can tell everybody) smells like strawberries. Mousy little Anna who smells like fruit and sugar, as sweet as she is. He was thinking it would be good to do something nice for her today, after the horror of today.

"I just want to see it again," whispers Anna.

She feels as though she has cracked the world like an egg, this secret. So this was it. But didn't she already know?! Her hug with Walter is cold and mistrustful. All of them, even him. She feels as though she's been suddenly awakened, angrier, awakened from some pleasant and disturbing dream. So this was it, always.

The laboratory is at the end of the hallway, a little blue room of light and darkness. Long bands of fluorescent light darken by contrast the corners of the room, plunging into shadow the objects against its walls. But there, in the center, all alone and totally radiant, capturing the light on her skin, lies *her*... the air is calm, there is almost no sound. Anna approaches, feeling her own rage, its dimensions and its properties. She feels its presence throughout her entire body. She can feel the chilliness of the room now, the sensation of her feet against the floor, the eyes of Walter behind her, looking at her, sizing her up. She feels as if she is approaching something purely evil.

Walter studies the robot from the doorway, feeling uneasy.

"It really is kind of excessive, isn't it?"

"..."

"I think there are talks of a male prototype," he says. "Just to let you know."

Anna does not answer. She hovers her hand over the cool metal. Inside she feels

her vacancies expanding, filling up with emotion and lucidity. She touches *her*. She lays her hand softly on *her* shoulder. My God, thinks Anna, from her purse producing a small sledgehammer, as dull as the woman is glistening. I am really about to do this, me. Meanwhile something is emerging from very deep inside of her, something small and glowing and full of color.

“Anna,” says Walter, meaning to stop her. And then quickly he averts his eyes. He is realizing something, slowly. He feels exposed, humiliated.

My God, thinks Anna. She is touching the robot’s skin. Softly she tucks its hair behind its ears, *her* hair which is as white as snow. She runs her finger across the engraving on the back of her neck, which reads *Donna Haraway: Davidson Mechanics Service Robot, Model 1.0*. She can hear the engineer laughing. She is touching the robot which looked cold but is actually warm. She pets the robot’s hair. Suddenly she leans in and smells shampoo... strawberry, strawberry and coconut, Herbal Essences, so familiar. She leans in closer. Hey, thinks Anna, I know. What a miserable world, but I’m taking you out of it. You should thank me.

She looks at the robot’s body, crumpled up and submissive, and then down at her own. The female body, the same female body. As if she’s been exported... Her eyes begin to widen. I want to paint bright pink lipstick over stainless steel, thinks Anna, the beauty of rose on sterling. I want to take her home. I want to dress her up in something nice, something pretty and modest. I’ve never had a friend. I’ll tuck her into red velvet sheets and we’ll sleep side by side, safe and warm, and we’ll chat until the morning, like schoolgirls. She invades my heart, my sensibilities. I feel bright and weightless all over again. The two of us as light and as heavenly as freed birds, flying away from here, somewhere distant, just the two of us, straight into the paradise of my dreams.

AUSTYN WOHLERS is a student of Comparative Literature and Creative Writing at Emory University. Her work has previously been published in *Shooter Literary Magazine* and in *Alyss*.

A CRYOGENIC STATE

Garrett Biggs

Sheryl did not hear the sparrow strike the window glass. Or rather, when she heard the collision, she mistook it for something inside her body: a gooey limb kicking at her pelvic region, sudden but half-formed; that moment her mother told her about, where, with a single motion, she would become aware of all the different children gestating inside. She set a hand to her waist, then left the room to vomit. Only after she returned to her office, when she saw the sparrow's broken wing, did she realize that there had been no kick at all, but a bird attempting to fly in.

This was the thirty-fourth week of her pregnancy, on an unusually cold day in September. Before returning to her office, she had spent the early morning walking out to the pier, her hand set beneath her stomach, searching for some trace of her child. As it had been explained to her, during a first pregnancy, it was not unreasonable for some mothers to wait until the fifth or sixth month to feel the baby move. This time frame had passed though, she had yet to detect even a rumbling, and sometimes, when she stared at her round and bloated body in the mirror, she wondered if she was filled with nothing more than air—whether a wind had slipped inside her uterus and been mistaken for a child.

When she first asked the doctor whether this kind of wait was normal, he glanced at the ultrasound, and said there was nothing to worry about: her baby was just a still thing. It was an offhand comment, muttered softly beneath his breath, but Sheryl misunderstood the phrase “still thing” for stillborn, and she immediately burst into a bout of tears that left the doctor red and sorry.

Now, she stood above a bloody wing, and her chin was beginning to twitch in much the same way. She opened the sliding glass door and reached outside. The bird was jerking forward, smacking its beak against the brick floor. Sheryl knew this kind of thing shouldn't disturb her—*far more disturbing sights every day*, her mother might say—but its eyes were wild and its ribs were undulating, and she worried that if the bird flailed long enough, its beak might tear a kind of hole in the fabric of the universe. She imagined a cruel and dark tendril from another world,

slipping down her throat and through her uterine lining, forcing the child to finally move.

What kind of fantasy is this? she asked herself, but before she received an answer, the bird's wings steadied. Its heartbeat slowed and its eyes closed. She slid the door shut.

Recently, Sheryl had taken to eating out at the local Irish pub. She ordered only the onion rings. The pub was staffed with a single waiter, Marv, who wore horn-rimmed glasses and did not know how to work the television remote. It had become typical, in these months preceding the child's birth, for Marv to ask Sheryl to change the television channel for him. She would stand on the red-leather booth, arch her back, and when she finally changed the station, Marv would applaud to an empty room. Before long, it became transactional: find the right angle for the remote, and get paid with a second round of onion rings.

They always tasted better the second time. Earned, rather than bought.

"Why do you always choose that booth?" Marv asked. He was standing behind the bar, spraying a bottle filled with neon blue fluid.

"The lights in this corner are dimmer," she said. "It hides the rash on my arm."

"I once had a rash," he said, chewing on a pistachio. "I thought it was in the shape of an iguana, but my wife said it was just the shape of a rash."

Sheryl stood and walked over to the bar, where the light bulbs hung closer to the floor. "What shape is this?" she asked.

She lifted her arm and set it on the bar between them. Marv inched his glasses down his nose, and closely examined her arm.

Sheryl felt the same way about rashes as she did pimples: she thought they were disgusting. She remembered, when she was young, standing in front of the mirror at her mother's nail salon. It was in a local shopping complex, down a hallway of offices with the store names written in Vietnamese. While her mother sat with her bare feet above a peeling gray sink, selecting colors of polish, Sheryl squeezed pimples off her face, wiping their pus at the bottom of the mirror. To her, this rash was much the same. Her doctor said this wasn't his expertise, but the rash

probably resulted from a change in diet. He said to try and stay away from the onion rings.

Marv spun her arm under the lights as if they were dancing. Sheryl laughed, forgetting what she had asked, and told him to be careful. She didn't want to give the baby whiplash. She paid the check at the bar, and tipped Marv an extra dollar than usual. She returned to her booth, put on her blue windbreaker, and made way for the door.

"A spaceship," Marv said.

"What?" Sheryl said.

"Your rash," he said. "It looks kind of like a spaceship."

Sheryl's mother had a different opinion from the doctor's, something Sheryl had not considered. She believed, in her heart, that the baby was a stone.

Her mother lived an hour south in Salinas, where she had purchased a yellow house with a mostly-rotting avocado farm in the back. Sheryl called her sometimes, only when she felt anxious, but all her mother ever wanted to talk about were this child and its variations.

"I don't mean to be gauche," she said, "but I heard about this when I went with your aunt to Thailand. You will not believe the kinds of babies they have out there. Agate, basalt, obsidian. The tour guides, they were telling us about these poor women: they go, get knocked up, and then the next thing they know, they're giving birth to a stone."

"Obsidian?" Sheryl said. This sounded almost nice to her.

"Yes! Obsidian! Is that not the most miserable thing you've ever heard?"

Sheryl didn't answer. She hated questions like this. Instead, she turned the television on mute, while her mother continued to talk about stones, then avocados, then the leaky faucet that she had installed last week. Sheryl flipped through the channels. She watched the beginning of a movie she had never heard of, titled *Dark Star*. She made popcorn on the stove and burnt the kernels at the bottom, and she told her mother she had to go, but was glad they got to talk.

"Wait—one more thing," Sheryl said, before her mother hung up the phone.

"Something happened yesterday."

"What kind of thing?" her mother said.

"I was working at my desk and then some bird smacked into the window. Now it's lying dead on the patio. What am I supposed to do with it?" she said.

"I don't know. Bury it? It's a bird," she said.

"Thanks," Sheryl said.

She hung up the phone. Outside, the sun had set. The shore was glowing blue, lined with fish spines and phosphorous.

Sheryl stood through the final minutes of *Dark Star*, staring outside at the sparrow. She could not bring herself to bury it yet. She tried to forget about the animal, stepped into her bedroom, and threw her shirt in the laundry basket. She made another batch of popcorn half-naked, this time not burning any kernels. With night falling, the kitchen window turned into a kind of mirror. Sheryl watched her shirtless reflection, and began to trace the outline of her baby. Then she tried to remember the last time someone had held her waist. The second batch of popcorn was a mistake, she decided. Her chest began to sink. She was doing it again: falling into that desolate region of the ocean where no light could reach. She imagined her unborn child as a slab of limestone, cradled in the doctor's arms. She imagined all the horrible things her child would eventually say. She imagined what would happen if the child never crawled out of her. Her baby starting to decompose, wrapped in a layer of moss and larvae like the branches of an ancient tree.

In the living room, another viewing of *Dark Star* began to blare. She resolved to turn off the television, but instead, at the sight of the screen, she turned up its volume. She sat down with the empty bowl. She watched the movie again.

The next morning, Sheryl woke from dreams about a scout ship in *Dark Star*, how they kept the dead commander alive in a cryogenic state. She tossed around in bed for a while, and when she finally opened her eyes, she found her rash covered

her entire forearm. She scratched at it with her fingernails until everything was hot pink.

Then the phone rang.

"I'm coming into town today," her mother said. "It's the only place where I can find pesticides that won't kill the avocados."

"Do you need a place to stay for the night?" Sheryl asked.

"No, I'll just drive back later in the day. What about lunch?"

It was decided that they would meet at the pub thirty minutes before noon. Her mother said she needed enough time to find the right pesticide, and then drive halfway across town. On the walk to the pub, Sheryl saw a one-armed boy throwing a frisbee on the beach. The frisbee had a smiley face painted at its center. The sun was bright, and she could feel pools of sweat gathering under her armpits, but she kept her long sleeves rolled down in an effort to conceal the rash. She put a hand to her stomach, hoping this heat might force her baby into even the slightest uncomfortable wiggle.

When she stepped inside the pub, Sheryl saw her mother was already there, with a floral scarf wrapped around her head. She asked if her mother minded moving to her regular booth, but when her mother's eyebrows arched in confusion, Sheryl decided it wasn't worth the battle. The rash was hidden underneath her shirt, anyway.

"And why do you frequent this place?" her mother asked, flipping through the menu.

"I started going once my maternity leave began. It's the only place nearby open breakfast, lunch and dinner," Sheryl said. "Did you find the pesticides you needed?"

Her mother put a straw between her two purple lips, and took a large drink of Diet Pepsi. "I'm afraid I wasn't honest with you," she said.

"What do you mean?" Sheryl asked.

"I didn't actually come to town for pesticides. I came to ask a favor of you," she

said.

As it turned out, pesticides would not have begun to fix her problems. The way Sheryl's mother told it, buying the house was a giant mistake. She had purchased the house last May with the promise of owning a farm, only to find she could grow nothing but rot and yellowed fruit. First, she tried buying more fertile soil. Then she installed a sprinkler system. She figured it was money well spent—that the farm would return her investment. But the trees would still not grow and the fruits would not fall, and now she owed more money than she had ever seen at once.

"Long story short," she said. "I'm in debt. Worse than I can ever remember. And you know I wouldn't come to you if I didn't absolutely need to, but what else am I supposed to do?" she asked.

Sheryl didn't believe a word of it. She looked over her mother's shoulder at Marv, who was cleaning her usual booth, pretending he couldn't hear the conversation.

"How much do you need?" Sheryl said.

Her mother took a piece of paper out of her purse and scribbled a number in purple ink. She passed it over, face down. Sheryl lifted it from the table and considered the number. "That much?" she said. "I don't know if I can."

It was true: Sheryl had not checked her bank account in months, and she wasn't going to make promises so easily. Her hesitance didn't spring from a place of bitterness so much as it did a genuine fear that she might not be able to fulfill the task. This was not the first time her mother had asked to borrow money, and she knew it would not be the last. It had been like this ever since she graduated college, since she took scissors to her mother's credit cards, since she was named partner at the law-firm. Since she moved to the beach and built the new house. It was a rare constant in her life, and yet it surprised her every time.

After her mother left the pub, Sheryl went into the bathroom to vomit. She emptied her stomach, all bile and venom, and exited the restaurant, forgetting to pay. Outside she saw that the one-armed boy was still throwing his frisbee. The sun was elongating his shadow across the sand, and onto a stretch of beachrock. She was suddenly determined to see her doctor. He had not responded to her voicemails in days.

"Tell me," she said into the receiver during one desperate call. "How can you leave a patient alone like this? How can you let her rot away?" And then in another: "I'm not feeling well, doctor. You said the nausea would go away months ago. My waist is expanding but I still feel empty. It's like a parasite played backwards. Call me, please."

By the time Sheryl arrived at the clinic, her shirt was soaked through with sweat, and the rash on her arm was burning. She stepped towards the receptionist's desk and explained she did not have an appointment, but needed to speak to the doctor immediately. The receptionist said it would be only one more moment, and to take a seat in the waiting area. She frowned and tried to look away from Sheryl, one hand with a phone against her ear, and the other holding a finger outward as if to say, *Will you be quiet please?* The phone made a miserable beeping noise. Sheryl began to pace around the waiting area. Searching for any distraction she could find, she placed her attention on a plastic terracotta pot, empty and resting on a stack of magazines. An older woman sat behind her.

"Would you like room to sit?" she asked, lifting a *Health & Fitness* magazine from the seat next to her.

"That's all right," Sheryl said. "Thank you, though."

The woman set the magazine on the table next to her. "No, really," she said. "You look tired. I insist."

Sheryl smiled politely and took the seat. She examined her neighbor. The woman had long tendrils of gray hair and a crooked mouth, and although she couldn't have been any younger than Sheryl's mother, as Sheryl's eyes sank down the woman's body, it was apparently obvious to her that she too was pregnant. Upon this realization, she made eye contact with the woman. There was nothing appealing about her. She wore ragged yellow maternity clothes and smelled vaguely of soured milk. "Do you know what this pot is for?" the woman asked.

"I can't say I do," Sheryl said.

"I saw you looking at it kind of curious," the woman said. "I wondered if you might know why they'd leave an empty pot in a waiting area." Sheryl shrugged her shoulders. "You made quite an entrance there," she laughed.

It hadn't occurred to Sheryl until now how her arrival must have appeared: a rash-covered, sweaty woman, eight months pregnant, slamming through the doors and demanding to see her doctor. A pang of embarrassment split through her. Her face burned red. "The doctor hasn't responded to any of my phone calls. I couldn't stand to wait any longer," she said.

"Well unfortunately, I think we are both here to be disappointed. The lady over there just informed me there were no more openings for the day."

"Then what are you still doing here?" Sheryl asked.

"I thought I would finish reading my magazine," she said, holding up another copy of *Health & Fitness*. "It's really the only reason to come here anyway," she winked. Sheryl looked away from the woman to find that the receptionist had gone missing from her desk. She tried to smile at her, but she could feel her chin beginning to twitch. She was sinking again, thinking about the sparrow and the baby and her mother's money, a place in the ocean so desolate it could collapse a human skull.

"Are you all right?" the woman said.

Sheryl didn't move. "Can I ask you a question?" she said.

"Of course," the woman said.

"Oh my God, I sound insane," she said, running her fingers through her sweat-stained hair. "But if a baby is, let's call it, unnaturally still—you don't think there is any chance that she's a stone?"

"She?" the woman said.

"What?" Sheryl said.

"You said 'she,' not it," the woman said. "I don't mean to sound regressive or what have you, but I don't usually think of most people ascribing genders to stones. And you seem like most people. So if you're having a daughter and you're calling her a daughter, then I would assume she will be a baby. Not a stone."

Sheryl sat there silent.

"I'm not wrong, am I?" the woman said.

"No," Sheryl said. "Thank you."

The receptionist returned to the women, and explained that she was sorry to keep Sheryl waiting, but the doctor had no availability for the remainder of the day. She said to call again tomorrow. On their walk out the door, Sheryl waved goodbye to the woman, and then turned the corner, smiling a little.

When Sheryl arrived home that night, her mailbox was spilling over with unwanted coupons. She cradled the stacks of paper in both her arms, and tried her best to unlock her front door. The house inside was dark, except for a single reading lamp, flickering in the corner. Sheryl set the mail on her counter, took her checkbook out from a drawer, and turned on the television. It was playing a rerun of *Law and Order SVU*. She scrolled through the channels to see if *Dark Star* was on, but she soon realized it wasn't, and figured the marathon was a one-time thing. She opened her checkbook and wrote a check to her mother. Then she crumpled the paper. She wrote another check, and crumpled that paper too. This went on for a while. She was performing a ritual, bathing herself in the blue light of the television. She stood from her chair, stepped into her office to see if she could bring herself to bury the sparrow, and it was here, staring at a dead bird lying on her patio, where she felt the full force of a baby's foot strike her from the inside of her waist. She stood silently, and reached for the phone on her desk. Unsure whom she would call, she set the phone back down. Her insides were churning, but outside she remained still, squinting her eyes and craning her neck to see if it was only a bird.

But it wasn't. It was a kick. It was a girl. It was a fetal mess of limb and bone. And after paying for the previous day's meal, she told Marv every detail. She told him about the woman at the doctor's office and the blue light on the television, and when she threw on her coat, he asked where she was going, and she explained she had to go bury a bird. On her walk outside, past the pier, Sheryl listened to the sound of waves. She wondered if everything fell to silence, whether she could hear the sand and stones erode. She promised herself when she saw the sparrow, she would do just what she had told Marv. And later at home, when no one was looking, she did.

GARRETT BIGGS'S work has appeared in *CutBank*, *Nashville Review*, and *The Offing*, among other publications. He is managing editor of *The Adroit Journal*, and a MFA candidate in fiction at the University of Colorado Boulder.

REPORT FROM DRESDEN

Samuel Rafael Barber

There is so much work to be done that Vladimir and I are out of our minds as we sit at the large, square table we have been forced to share on account of the lack of tables suitable for our purposes, here in Dresden. There are newspapers to be read, articles cut and stapled and sorted, duplicated and mailed. There are books to be read, pages cut and stapled and sorted, duplicated and mailed. But mostly, there are reports to be read, passages cut and stapled and sorted, duplicated and mailed. To say nothing of the many reports to be written after selecting the most vital passages, in our own estimations, to cut and staple and sort and duplicate and mail. It has come to our attention that the city's table shortage might be coming to end, but Vladimir dares not trust the source of this information, nor do I dare trust the source of this information either.

There are thousands of reports on the table before which Vladimir and I sit, day after day, I taking the occasional break from my diligent work to expel nervous tension with a crossword puzzle, Vladimir choosing to interrupt his nervous tension and diligent work with the periodic snack. Vladimir does not snack like a normal person, however, as he insists on eating an entire meal when most would be satisfied with a banana or something of the sort. He snacks every other hour, or so. Without deviation, Vladimir eats a ham and cheese sandwich and an entire bag of carrots and a pastry injected with some sort of custard during his snack, also taking sporadic sips from his canteen. I am suspicious that in this way he has been smuggling vodka into the workplace, drinking on the job. As far as I can tell, the drinking has yet to affect his work. I have contemplated writing a report on the matter, still, for it is a serious violation of protocol. But I cannot verify this hunch for I am smuggling vodka into the workplace in my canteen, drinking on the job. As far as I can tell, the drinking has yet to affect my work. So the alcohol I smell on his breath may originate from my own. It is hard to know for certain. There is so much work to be done I cannot be sure.

There are at least two thousand four hundred and sixty-three reports on the table. In all likelihood, many more. I counted them, once. I cannot be sure how long ago this would have been. For a time, Vladimir carved a notch into the table when a

day passed, and I carved a notch into the table whenever a new report arrived. At first, I would fill in a notch with wood shavings when a report had been read, passages cut and stapled and sorted, duplicated and mailed. Following two weeks of this patterning and after comparing the rate of reports arriving at the table to the rate of reports departing from the table, I stopped bothering. The markings remain, here, on the large, square table, though they are hidden by the thousands of reports as of yet left unread and uncut and unstapled and unsorted, unduplicated and unmailed. Not that consulting the notches would be of much use. The notches now cover the whole table we are pretty sure, since they covered the table before The Pile grew and obscured their intent, making it impossible to distinguish Vladimir's notches from my own. I hope you are paying close attention. This is all crucial.

We did not expect to carve notches into the table for such a lengthy period. It was almost a sort of joke, originally, is the thing. Dresden is a backwater job (as you know) and we each expected to serve at this post for only a brief time, as we continued following the trajectory of our careers. My trajectory being upward, having joined the service four years ago and yet so quickly assigned to Second Chief Directorate followed shortly by the appointment to Directorate S. Superiors appreciating my loyalty and dedication, peers envying my ambition. The best thing about Vladimir, my favorite thing about Vladimir, is that he does not envy my ambition. Vladimir does not envy my ambition because his trajectory is downward, as he is in the twilight of his career. His life has been dedicated to country, but it is almost over, now, and so his career must also end soon. He is awaiting his retirement orders any day now. Just as I am awaiting my promotional re-assignment orders any day now. Perhaps you are aware of the delay. Vladimir opines that the entire intelligence structure is affected, not that I would idly speculate in such a way, for my faith in the state remains unshaken.

It is true, however, that we were told our respective orders would be arriving "any day now" and it is also true that many weeks have passed since then. Vladimir and I began carving notches in the table not long after we first received the good news. Now they say the reports must continue to be read, pages cut and stapled and sorted, duplicated and mailed, in the interim, while we wait. This does not inspire Vladimir and me. In fact, it infuriates us. I know this because Vladimir has taken to muttering filthy things under his breath as he goes about his work, just as I have begun to mutter mild criticisms of bureaucratic inefficiency as I go about mine. Unfortunately, our orders arrive disguised within reports as a precautionary measure in the event of attempted sabotage by the West. They even go so far as to adopt the sort of language typically found in the reports, language neutral in

tone and devoid of imagination. They expect that our familiarity with reports, after all this time, will help us quickly identify the coded orders embedded within. So it is impossible to immediately distinguish between the reports containing our orders and the reports with demographic information or Western mail-order catalogues or phone installation instructions or any of the other material which, day after day, week and week, Vladimir and I read and cut and staple and sort, duplicate and mail.

For a time, once the table had been covered with notches but before the table became covered in reports, we proposed, discussed, debated, and ultimately voted to only read and cut and staple and sort and duplicate and mail reports pertaining to our orders. But this was a short-lived exercise for the reason provided above, not that you can tell from its permanent placement on the wall to my right and to Vladimir's left underneath a brief heading that more or less codifies the means by which Vladimir and I will propose, discuss, debate, and vote on future topics and/or avenues of inquiry pertaining to but not strictly limited to orders, reports, treatment of our clerk Skip, and our apartment. This last clause is in dire need of revision, however, since we no longer share an apartment. Not long ago we decided to abandon our official quarters so as to indefinitely reside at our workstation, the large, square table we have been forced to share on account of the lack of tables suitable for our purposes, here in Dresden. We do this so we need not ever stop processing reports. We do this so we need not remain in our stations, here in Dresden, any longer than need be.

The Pile (as we call it, though Skip has tried to take credit for the coinage on more than one occasion, proving beyond any doubt that he is deserving of scorn) makes it very difficult to fill out a crossword in peace, what with its reports sliding around and falling all about, what with its reports perpetually flirting with the edges of the table. The Pile taunts us with the omnipresent threat of spilling its contents upon The Pile of Spilled Reports Awaiting Cleanup on the Floor (as we call it, it pleasing us greatly that Skip has yet to claim credit for this moniker). I understand that The Pile makes eating a ham and cheese sandwich and an entire bag of carrots and a pastry injected with some sort of custard similarly difficult, for Vladimir has offered such a complaint on many occasions. I have tried to empathize with Vladimir's frustration by explaining my own difficulties in filling out a crossword puzzle under these perverse conditions, but he only insists that I stop whining with a dismissive shake of his head, as he is too busy whining about his own difficulties (eating the snacks that are really meals he chooses to call by another name since Vladimir does not snack like a normal person) to empathize with the likes of me.

I am doing my best to succinctly state my case. It is all such a mess, thousands of unsorted reports not meant for haphazard placement upon a table covered with notches and ink stains and carrot fragments. The natural habitat of a report being a filing cabinet or cardboard box. But there is a scarcity of filing cabinets in Dresden and a scarcity of cardboard boxes in Dresden, too. It has come to our attention that these shortages might be coming to end, but Vladimir dares not trust the source of this information, nor do I dare trust the source of this information either. This promise was made in a report received so long ago that neither Vladimir nor I can offer more than a vague approximation of its postage date. If pressed, one of us might feign certainty using an assertive tone of voice which seeks to convey it quite clearly first came into Skip's possession several months ago, at the very latest. This promise was made in a report ordering us to "maintain [our] great efficiency" and "continue [our] esteemed lives of service to country by preserving the safety of the motherland through due diligence and perseverance." Thereafter, we decided to stack the reports methodically. To alphabetize them, even. This amendment to our protocol was proposed by Vladimir, discussed, debated, and ultimately voted on by us both, and written on the wall to my left and Vladimir's right.

In those halcyon days before the carving of notches and the birth of The Pile and the abandonment of our apartment, we were preparing for the eventual arrival of a filing cabinet or cardboard box. Both Vladimir and I were on the same page (metaphorically speaking and not, of course, on the same page of the same report) when it came to the importance of organization within any and all bureaucracy. But the more I reflect, now, the more convinced I become that I was duped, then. The plan was sabotaged from the start, the table deluged with so many new reports (we now refer to this episode as The Great Deluge) by the time we had expended so much time and effort meticulously sorting the original batch of reports into stacks, destroying the order we had imposed, giving rise to The Pile, an entity of almost unimaginable height and girth.

I initially blamed our clerk Skip for this oversight, whom both Vladimir and I detest for he is middle-aged and content, not wanting to leave this place for a promotion as is my goal or leave this place for retirement and death as is Vladimir's. Skip's only purpose, so far as Vladimir or I can tell, is to wheel in fresh reports using the little grocery cart he undoubtedly stole from some supermarket he frequents (or used to frequent if he is concerned its employees might suspect him of having stolen a grocery cart for the purpose of wheeling in fresh reports and wheeling out reports to be mailed) for Skip is not an enterprising sort. Skip could never steal

a grocery cart with the guile required of a valued asset. I have contemplated writing a report related to Skip's probable thievery of the grocery cart, but as you surely already see, we are really quite overwhelmed, at the present, with our work. In light of the available evidence, it seems natural to project my feelings of hostility upon Skip, and to consider him a possible culprit in the sabotage of our organizational mission. But I am also beginning to suspect Vladimir.

I am beginning to theorize, if only while muttering mild criticisms of bureaucratic inefficiency as I go about my work and Vladimir mutters filthy things under his breath as he goes about his, that Vladimir engineered this entire amendment to our workplace constitution just to spite me. He knows, after all, that I require a sterling report from my time here in Dresden to maintain my rise through the ranks. And having descended through the ranks as quickly as I have ascended through them, Vladimir is under no such stipulation, being sufficiently confident (it would seem) that his mediocrity in this post will only strengthen the case against him and expedite his retirement and death. What a traitor Vladimir just might be. He has mentioned entering politics "to keep busy during that brief time in the life of a civil servant following retirement but before death" and it is true that the requirements of character and conduct, in that sphere, correspond with his declining scruples and sense of hygiene.

Now, I anticipate your skepticism. I anticipate a likely retort. You might find yourself asking, with a tone expressing only the most barely veiled condescension: what sort of behavior would provoke this level of confidence in the deception of a colleague? Well, I might find myself replying in only the most patient manner: a looming suspicion first made its presence known once Vladimir crudely insisted Gogol is surely to be considered a Russian when the master's categorization as Ukrainian seems obvious. If this affront to good taste is not satisfactorily convincing, let me edify your concerns by briefly explaining the peculiar circumstances which led to our permanent relocation to the large, square table we now call home. Back when we cohabited in the apartment, back when he violated our television agreement, the ninth amendment to our workplace constitution written on the wall to my right and Vladimir's left.

We were assigned government housing some months ago. The apartment suited men of our means. Let there be no confusion, I do not mean any disrespect. We each had a separate bed, sharing a toilet and television with two channels. You are familiar with the details of such accommodations, surely. Men strive to be free. Men strive for agency, for power. And so we would often disagree over who had the authority to preside over the television remote. I made the case that since we

were of equal rank and since I was assured to be promoted in a short while, I was essentially Vladimir's superior and thus the natural choice for Governor of the Remote. Vladimir made the case that since we were of equal rank and since he had been demoted on many occasions (demoted more times than I had been promoted, even) he was essentially my superior and thus the natural choice for Governor of the Remote. Since each proposition, discussion, debate, and vote resulted in a 1-1 stalemate, we eventually proposed, discussed, debated, and voted successfully to pass an amendment codifying the impossibility of ever coming to any kind of definitive determination on the matter and forbidding future proposals, discussions, debates, and votes regarding the ultimate television authority since we were pretty sick of it all, by then.

We felt that official closure, of sorts, was needed following the tense days devoted to proposing, discussing, debating, and voting. Days which had swallowed whole all remaining time after the reading and cutting and stapling and sorting, duplicating and mailing. There was no watching of television during this time, only discussion of how we might go about watching television in the future. Discussion of how this precedent would shape how our children go about watching television, how our children's children go about watching television.

This period of détente was all too brief. In no time at all, we realized that the programs which interested each of us most frequently overlapped in time slot. If our constitution would not save us, we realized another sort of compromise was needed.

Some context: I have never expended much body heat, and so do not sweat or stink unless I experience a prolonged interval between baths. Vladimir, on the other hand, expends an incredible amount of body heat (I have contemplated writing a report on the matter). Vladimir is a sort of space heater of flesh and blood. You can imagine the quantity of sweat, then, and the implications of this sweat. In exchange for Vladimir receiving my allocated bathroom time Monday through Wednesday and Friday through Saturday, I received an additional two and a half hours of weekly television time for use whenever I liked. I did not tell Vladimir this then (though I have since done so out of spite) but I always considered the exchange a lopsided deal in my favor since Vladimir's increased dedication to personal hygiene improved my life to no small degree, in and of itself.

This excoriation of his bargaining abilities might have been my last articulated message to him, in fact. We are no longer on speaking terms even as we have

never been closer together, in some ways, at the large, square table covered with thousands of reports and thousands of notches, his lack of personal hygiene nauseating me, the discharge of vomit from my mouth in response to the nausea nauseating him in turn. Gross, you might find yourself mumbling in response, and while it certainly remains within your purview to respond in this way, your absolute attention is of the utmost importance, now. Here is my story's key twist. I am going to ask you to focus intently on what I am about to say, but do not mistake my insistence for an impolite gesture.

You see, Vladimir eventually stopped bathing during my allocated bathing times while simultaneously refusing to let me enjoy my rightfully bargained surplus of television. It seems grossly unfair, in my estimation, that he reneged on our compact without maneuvering through the proper constitutional channels. I have proposed, discussed, debated, and voted on many constitutional amendments wishing to officially designate Vladimir's refutation of our freely negotiated deal a traitorous act. But no matter the expertise with which I prepare my opening remarks, or the number of times I have forced Skip, our clerk, to revise my closing statement, I am never able to sway Vladimir. Each vote ends in a 1-1 deadlock, though I am optimistic that this might change in the near future. I was a skilled orator in school. It was one of the skills that most impressed my superiors, back before I had even been assigned to the Second Chief Directorate, back when my capacity for verbal fireworks mimicked the articulateness of my written word. I was told this vital aptitude was an important component of the assorted criteria considered for my assignment, here in Dresden. But the very skills so crucial to the work are crippled in their exercise.

Our conditions are not so great, it is true, but times are tough in Dresden, as they are in Moscow, and so we understand. There are "economic externalities" to consider the reports tell us and I tell Vladimir and Vladimir tells me and both of us tell Skip whenever he complains about the stench emanating from this table of ours. And so I hope you will exercise a similar understanding when it comes to my breaking protocol, here, in sending a report outside of the designated channels. I was fearful my other pleas weren't getting through, you see. This is the seventh time I have explained all this. I would like to think I am improving, refining my technique. This is unknowable. Nor does it matter much, I suppose. We hear that the wall may be falling soon, and it worries us, Vladimir and me. We trust the sources of this information, is the thing. We need reassurance. But most of all, we need Vladimir to be punished.

On that I hope men of our stock can agree, since you have now read my full report.

Which you must have done since you are reading these very words right this second. Unless you skipped to the end for some inexplicable reason, deciding that the effort and sacrifice on behalf of the greater good made in the preceding pages wasn't worth your time, deciding a quick skim could possibly be sufficient when it is always the context that is most crucial. I grow weary of this writing, nervous as I am that it will come to nothing. Little has changed from the reports that have failed to elicit a response from your department on the previous six occasions, in terms of content. But I am sure you have read the whole thing, just as I am sure you will address The Vladimir Problem (as I call it), on this occasion. Perhaps his punishment might be received in the report with the orders he is expecting, the ones allowing him to retire and die. Perhaps my own orders can be included as well, the ones with my promotion and reassignment elsewhere. But if you skipped the majority of my report and are short on time, I kindly ask you to revisit the paragraph prior to this one, at least. All essential facts are contained, there. I eagerly anticipate your report on this matter. Meanwhile, we wait and the table waits and The Pile waits and Skip waits, after Vladimir and I give him a dirty look and he flees elsewhere with his grocery cart filled with fresh reports, for our orders.

Major Poroshenko
18 of June

SAMUEL RAFAEL BARBER has an MFA from the University of Arizona and an MA in English and Comparative Literature from Columbia University. His work has appeared in *DIAGRAM*, *Fanzine*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *TIMBER*, among other journals. According to life expectancy tables, he will live another 57.2 years. For now, you can find him at www.samuelrafaelbarber.com and somewhere within a certain American city.

THE NEW-ENGLAND GIRL'S SONG ABOUT THANKSGIVING DAY

Rennie Ament

Unfollow the river and burn the wood.
Let sleigh carry the horse for once.

Be *odd like horses lying down*,
their apricot-sized nostrils.

Road stripped of necessity,
stay down, grow snake-steering—

slither off animal attributes.
If you say lamb, I say hawk,

if you say, *You act like a hawk*,
I put on lamb and preen superior

softness. Wet snow for breakfast,
pie for music: they await

the final verse, where grandma laps
around the yard, all her old rapes jingling.

RENNIE (RENATA) AMENT's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Colorado Review*, *Sixth Finch*, *Redivider*, *cream city review*, *minnesota review*, *The Journal*, *DIAGRAM*, and elsewhere. A nominee for the Pushcart Prize and Best New Poets, she has received support from the Millay Colony, the Saltonstall Foundation, the New York State Summer Writers Institute, the Vermont Studio Center and the Center for Book Arts. She lives in Harlem and online at www.rennieament.com

TWO POEMS

Paula Mendoza

NOSTOS, A LONGING

I learned the myth of a mother
rejecting her animal infant by scent

but remain half-convinced
of the touch that mars a body

alien, estranged, the way a thumb
measuring an in-between

distance just as soon might smear
my name illegible, a black

streak, the negative of meteor
debris tracking a wish across

white sky. No less the wake
of a folded boat along

a canal, paper buffeted past bottle
throats, snags of glass, all

discarded, iridesced. And, in our
wishing, scavenge what glitters

in the dreck. Because any exile
believes herself a changeling, taken

in. All her beloveds, duped.
A doubling like common time, or

how a slow shutter resolves into
an exposure of ghost in silver

nitrate, gelatin. If written, the
trope replaces waking, when,
vanished

by morning we ask—no-one who will
answer—where am I? Where am I now?

HALFWAY

You were between two animals.
Between two attributions.
At the crotch of a river's fork.
At a loss, at least.
Between all losses, tendering alms. By
the skin of one's stolen teeth.
The lethargy of one newly shorn.
To derive, say, attenuate, say
starved to a taper. A porousness. False
asphodel if aphasic, if sticky. Vaseline-
smear a focalization.
Ocean maw and mountain blade
recede. At last, at least—*this*. A figure
gathers line and edge. She is between
two roars. Who devours or drowns. Say
shore when you mean precipice. Say
split when you mean in pieces.
Redoubled at the jut of some far
becoming. Between, to say the least. A
shade and its absorption. To
swatch a sea's phonemes, to score
what of light she keeps to let through.

PAULA MENDOZA's work has appeared in *Bennington Review*, *Seneca Review*, *The Journal*, and elsewhere. She earned her MFA at the University of Michigan and is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Utah. She lives and writes in Salt Lake City.

AN ALMANAC

Joseph Johnson

This pass into space
creates half-chances.
One part: the body

brought with it.
We were silent, unspecific.
The other: starve-heart-

arisen, a slow-twitch
muscle of discussion,
damp in the ungroomed

drama of leaves
on our knees. Crisp seeds
tumbled off stalks

cut sharp by the known
future, not what we
were-to-be.

Your love of fear.
My darker flame.
The natural wing.

I watched a sunset
with no comment.
The sky spilled-

upon with thick ink,
a half-moon,
a day had been.

Those same seeds
descended all night
in sacred fashion. All night

I heard them hit the earth.
I heard birds chirp
in the dark.

Below the dirt,
worms & buried fur
& new millennium

time-capsules took in
vibrations. Tremors
of seed-storm. Constant.

Awakened was my far-off
awe of your every moment,
each loose clip

in your hair or kept
on your sweater.
I'm an almanac

of false frights, freight
folded from its rails
falling from a cutbank

in the floodplain, storm
warnings on static,
news of a pet

dropped soft
in the ditch, all loosening-
into, hatching bacteria.

It's almost rain-
smelling while some bright
bird wrapped

in its own wings
rolls in the road
in the wind.

Not everything responds
to sustenance
or is thus sustained.

So the strange-triangle
hangnails of dried-up
earth appear. So life

sinks out of reach.
Is such wakelessness
ours to keep?

My better explorations
of mossed thought in your eye?
In unspecified space

a whistle splits at your lips,
blown free of itself.
& a terrible calm

climbs over me.
The whistle spreads,
singing emptiness

loses hope of you
falling in. Emptiness falls
asleep like a theater.

JOSEPH JOHNSON is a teacher in New Meadows, Idaho. His work has appeared
in Big Big Wednesday and Forklift, Ohio.

FROM FREAKOPHONE WORLD

Madison McCartha

*

when let off my
leash

i wag my rancid
tail & jump

into your voice

you ready?

ready for battle?

then call the pigeon-swarm

to paint our blackest
tongue—

like a prom-queen
limousine under a mass

shitting

i only want

to become ink dotting the path

to rip

a little swamp-hole
we can breathe inside

so don't be a freak about it ok?

fissure-needle gold-injection

*

draw a zero

beneath this pyramid
of skulls

single pictorial gate

oceanbrine shoots out of

in your mouth

bite down
& i am yours—

spewing from your tongue

down your chin

into your little
offering

when you & the cliff the moon

repeating in its maroon-dye-loop

the book
open

i calcify

as a bone-chime-chorus

making my pneumatic
clicks

to tell you
we are alive

didn't you know?

a *griot* cannot die

even now
in the infraspook

a new body
accrues like—

ever seen
the squid-beak-build-up

of ambergris in the nasal
passage of a blue

demon?
like that

but with your regrets

one after the other—
each amulet

a bullet in the amber

like me

fetching the field-wren

rattling tin mug

shitting in the dark with the door open

red-rot blooming in

the irradiated soil

in the oak-bark-snatches of moonlight

in a palm

as extinct as

this shimmering black
tapestry of my looking—

each blond occlusion

written in the night's
syrup

in the sulfur trail

from where i am

to where i

die

tie a knot—

the vertebrae collapsing

such small surrenders

the way this glass breaks so you can eat

a bone breaks so you can breathe

a neck snaps so you can

fray

& i will have to start from dust

from fine black
threads

sewn through the lips
into a high-noon

plaza-with-its-one-drone

the sirens so quiet

i can finally smoke a cigarette in

the *feculence of the living &
the dead*

the stone

whole to see the ruin in

the formed thing—

to look to pieces

to keep shaking
to diffuse the light

*

if a sound

*

if i could

*

if you

*

if i just

*
if a pulse
*
if just a nibble
*
if i bite
*
if an itch
*
if you are here
*
if i smell you
*
if a black spot
*
if just a shape
*
if i fit
*
if a lung
*
if you're alone
*
if arrival
*
if December
*
if there was light
*
if people changed

look me in my big blind lidless eyes white as filth

& tell me i am found

MADISON MCCARTHA is a black poet whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Black Warrior Review*, *DREGINALD*, *Full-Stop*, *The Journal*, *jubilat*, *The Pinch*, and elsewhere. He has served as the Design Editor for *Cream City Review*, and became the Poetry Editor for *Storm Cellar*. Madison holds an MFA from the University of Notre Dame and is a 2018 Artist-In-Residence at The Millay Colony for the Arts.

TWO POEMS

Haesong Kwon

STUPA

Her people are kid goats
asleep on the vinyl floor of a room.

Scattered and sprawled
they're close and innocent.

They have a power.
Many of her peers

have declared her anathema.
They're trying to take away

the tattered stupa
but her people are ready

to defend, to revolt.
A Seon monk

she is a mother of two.
They have a power.

One man is the father
of a television star.

DRAGONFLIES, WARPLANES

“Later, we will get town
noodle soup,” said Grandpa.

“Shrimp
crackers,”

said the Buddha.

I knew the statue had peed on me
and felt the top of my head.

I sensed the tadpoles in the stream.

HAESONG KWON’S chapbook, “Many Have Fallen,” is forthcoming from *Cutbank Books*. He lives in Shiprock, New Mexico and teaches at Dine’ College. He was born in Incheon, Korea.

NEVER CONVERGE

Carolyn Bergonzo

I smoothed out with the day, lit by lamps
steered in, Insisted on premonition, kept
the little heater fed. Waiting for a thought
to appear, Let's move anywhere, walked
the track into love's regard. Felt acutely
an imposture. In summer pissing beside
a spider in my stripy shirtdress, I empty
thoughtless, save this wick and sunburn,
Received her forms as spiritual addenda
clipped uncomfortably to my hair. Sought
deep sympathy for the loss of an idea, even
that of my self as consistent, while desires
spurt apart, Host resolving before the beer
not to be important. What is the spirit of this
labor? That doesn't turn out to much. They
took us on vocation. My phone might die
before the Work extends from me, a Law
of my Nature, leaving only this mature stain,
the color of Pawtucket rosé. Or else the
call goes quiet. Or else the rest is private.

CAROLYN BERGONZO is a writer living in Massachusetts. She has an MFA in Literary Arts from Brown University, and a chapbook, *Echoplex* (PressBoard Press, 2017).

TO DISAPPEAR FOR MARQUETALLA

Tim VanDyke

memory of hunger in the unmoving places memory of
decay memory of the small gift of you memory of
erasure you and I disappear into a memory of
leaving out the door to go to work you left that image
revolving through my dreams memory of the path lost
and you circling back to find me
memory of rain high in the mountains
remember watching the clouds slide down the slope
memory of bullets
memory sliding out of my brain
memory of blood bound to the side of the hill
memory takes hold of nothing and shakes it awake
only to walk out the door
I take hold of it I bind it
I take hold of you, too, Manuel, and I bind you
just as my blood is bound to the memory of your sad eye

just as I take hold of the Colombian government
and those puppets strung up in the trees
planted with money from the North—
my corpse is dissolving into the river
into the reddened waves slapping the bank
and the rain washes out
the iron in my blood each particle stands on end
sifted through and partitioned along synapses
startled at the sound of an ambulatory moment in the sun
just as you and I disappear into the water like two snakes enmeshed
diadem blazing inside me as the ash covers your wet face
snakes struggling to claim the dead bird in their throats—
memory of my son
when he dives into the eddies and whirlpools
cut by the river's course
when he lets his body be dragged underwater
until drowning seems a certainty
until the hand of the Lord lifts his head out of damnation
and he goes back to the beginning to dive again—
memory disappeared beneath the river

how much now does the Lord raise up
to dance with the corpses in the forest
of those disappeared in full daylight and those disappeared
at night
how many to disappear for Marquetalla
my son remains on the cliff
beckoning to the firing squad
raising their arms on the shore
both are so darkly glimpsed beneath the waves
I can no longer tell one from the other

TIM VANDYKE has published *Topographies Drawn with a Divine Chain of Birds* (Lavender Ink/ Dialogos, 2011), *Fugue Engine* (Cannibal Books, 2012), *Light on the Lion's Face: A Reading of Baudrillard's Seduction* (Argotist, 2012), and *Farallones* (Garden Door Press, 2018). His recent work has appeared in *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Typo*, and elsewhere.

COSMOSES

Gina Keicher

i.

For a while, all I saw were novas for miles, Earth decreasing behind me. Space so dark I keep the wander tumbling with no end. No walls left to hit in my orbit. No comforts of home: wedding pictures, silver frames, clever throw pillows, my distance from a dinner table when talk dissolved into history, which is full of weapons and walls to hit if you do not look where you are running.

ii.

We need a different word for sad event anniversaries. A less joyful term to carry. Asteroids hurtle on, looking for walls or blue-green icebergs taller than buildings. My sadness does not make me special, but sometimes it feels that way. Brief contact with whoever is in control. The gravity of the situation. I try not to think about it. I get anxious. I get intense. I burn out like all the stars dissolving into smoke and want and flecks of silver that fall to earth, cure moon madness, inspire wishes and proposals.

iii.

In an old video of astronauts dropping cats aboard a spacecraft, the cats have minimal gravity. Maybe the moon makes me sick. Maybe nothing is the matter. Maybe you are having a heart attack. These things happen.

iv.

To say these things happen is not the same as saying this thing happened and revised my chemistry. This thing happened and revised history. This thing happened and repeated history.

v.

The space cat video voiceover says, *In these experiments you can see the disorientation resulting when an animal is suddenly placed in a weightless state.*

vi.

Sometimes I still think I can break my teeth on night if I bite down hard enough. These things happen.

vii.

Time happens differently in space and hospitals. Once we took your heart to the emergency room. We felt stupid as soon as we got there but the walk across the parking lot was clear night, hot stars, shapes someone named for myth. We listened to a woman in another room, her arm holding a thread. Her friends in the waiting room dressed up for Saturday night. The slow-timed beep continued and your heart was okay.

viii.

This automatic reflex action is almost completely lost under weightlessness.

ix.

Time happens different in space and bodies. My dog ate a tentacle off a toy shaped like a space alien and the vet mistook the mass on the x-ray for part of the dog and the tentacle came back up two weeks later.

x.

I have heard I have a biological clock even if I do not hear it. I have heard don't wait to want one to have one. I have heard, "Just one?" like motherhood is a dish I should try and maybe I will like it. These things happen.

xi.

I watched it for a little while, I like to watch things on TV. When I was younger all my worst boyfriends adored the cartoon about trash-mouthed boys, the joke that starts, *I just don't trust anything...* When each said the joke, they said it like they wrote it. They said it like I had not heard it before. They said it like my body was a

joke. I think about that joke once a month. I think about that joke when a nurse takes a picture to source my pain. *I just don't trust anything that bleeds for five days and doesn't die.* Can I trust the picture the machine spits out? Image like space photography, a moon or Mars. Small satellite of plastic and copper. I am more cosmos than floral.

xii.

In space no one can hear you scream but what if I told you I did not scream. I froze like water spilled out the side of a vessel in space. It happened so fast and went on for what felt like forever.

xiii.

I am full of mourn and trivia. My list of top ten ghosts to take tea with is longer than ten ghosts. My list is more like 80-something ghosts. It's possible to remove cup rings from wood furniture with a hair dryer. Or to organize excessively long cords in a discreet shoebox. Or to strip stovetop spots with a paste of baking soda and water and the sponge with the roses fading into grime. Or to organize your life into something nice so you walk around in a nice dream in your nice dress, walk home to your nice pink house and no one has to know about the black holes in your head. It's possible to use home improvement and décor as a distraction or filter. Or to saturate a garment with hairspray to erase a bloodstain. Or to walk around half a day with a bloodstain on the back of my dress, ebbing wider like a black hole. I'm not a fan of the phrase life hacks. But if you have a minute... If you have a minute, you can...

xiv.

In an emergency it is best not to move the injured. It's best to call a professional. An ambulance dispatched from the house beside the funeral home. The gravity of the situation. Now another. And another. My new ritual involves rising early to cry before the day begins, but in this blue light, the eternally metallic grey sky for months, I am not sure when day starts or when someone else will decide that floating into the universe is better than being on earth, so I am always crying to be safe.

xv.

Asking how far a bullet may travel in space does not seem as important as asking

the direction the bullet will take. In the video of cats in space, the cats have tiny hearts we cannot hear. Hearts the size of walnuts. We do not know if the cats died in space or returning to Earth, which may not be important to the voice telling us how they fall. The cats may have been mothers, or not. In the video, the cats twist forever like gas station hot dogs on a silver grill, rotate slowly mid-air, so they may land on their feet. And this teaches us about gravity. How we, too, fall. What terrain. What stretch.

***This poem borrows lines from an educational film about gravity and cats in space, a line from Lou Reed's song "Satellite of Love," the tagline from *Alien*, and an unfunny joke from *South Park*.

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THREE POEMS

Logan Fry

CLOAK

Waft final, bleak from sculpting a model, I add up all the nuance around me,
in total it so amounts to the winks a flaccid owl doles out. I love it. It is great.

Soon hair let down will feed the certain fire. Boring notes burn all the nicer
the boringer, so he got oily, slathered with lore he'd hewn, for tires love fire

near

completely, inside a left sandwich bag, having smeared goodly my hands to

get rid of it, your answers in sequence await but they're lonely—by burning,
made lonelier. An alley in this city is perpetually aflame. I know it's lame, to

say so. Acceptance can't clip
terror free

from the banality that's binding it. I'm told that is the whole point, of terror,
which we want. Now— listen— you can't touch the car door here or here or

there, here's OK, here is better, your experience is pleasure creeping nearer
when your back is turned. I'm only here to help. Flowers gouge out my eyes

because I let them. I can't decide
if I let them

because I want them to or want merely to accept it. If one were to construct
a scale model of scope it would need to be larger for sure. The type of tower

you're into is bleak. You're in it, gazing so, glancing about, regarding, down
like so, I look up there, where you are at, peering up, grinning, up, searching.

TROPING

I log a curt allowance skimming lean
from later-ons begun
in feal and therein ended.

Coming-to's an end again.
Gives' plum jus belies a loading pond.
Just prove that man's not.
Just prove that one man's not evil.

We want to go from the evidence back to him.

LOOK AT THE OLYMPIANS

Though perhaps what has fallen far enough past may bow
into a note, a score totes no sound. Sequence is what gets found.

Counting builds. The numerals that cushion plant flesh climb
the Acropolis. Atop are patient theses.

Figurative singing, who harps contends that
each pluck severs credos. It is how lungs lift.

How pliant may a will become and who is it
who slathers grease on wounds who earns this job who stomps

figs soft in that arena dirt who evicts fallow the busts there who
dips his pail in horror's runoff to not slosh the pillage home tell

me who. One who tours
history to sniff out edicts exits trailing scalps glued to his boot.

In frocks and dowdy on couches, repetition paws its snack bowl.
So bronzing melts duration. As digits ticker by on starchy peaks.

LOGAN FRY lives in Austin, Texas, edits *Flag + Void*, and has published poetry
in *Fence*, *Prelude*, *New American Writing*, *Boston Review*, and *Best American
Experimental Writing*.

AN INFO TO CHERISH

Kirsten Ihns

a lot of it

collected what fell on the ground

just as a puzzle

seven thousand people are watching it now

for in it miraculous, by only and things

the region grew so lately fatal

coming up cruxes, coming up spring, the sign

conquer by signs, the tulip bulbs and daffodils

yes, but where is it that you work

to watch and grow

a scent in the air, utter and ordinary,

i developed an expanded box of senses

sense of the type, the beauty, function

of hearing bent to other purpose, dim

what is the pan, be taken thus

at minimal angles

absolute extremely harm is pretty

aweful and surprising as it breaks across the screen

imagine your neighbor naked and mowing

i use the hottest water

for this i live with the ambulances passing by

buying an infinite pen, & a fringe of Georgia window

good luck for all French bread, they say

calm and slicing. wat if sun is risne

rinse, phenomenal addition

nominal math and math

can in new pleasure
i will star with another person
day, or trying to improve

that until everyone die, amazing music
it is nice to meet ppl
meanwhile, some girl is wasting paper
i detach the elasticated waist of my underwear
band
glitching stream
froot loop
organic fruit delivered to your door
the spoor of wild creatures cast upon the heath
the first time i have seen an ass in traces
a video you can edit again and again
approaching no nearer edge
are you a faith person's
princely hologram

tide knocked knees
 he said prepare the waiter cress i said ok
 i did an experimentation with the wall paper
 i said we can make it like a screen print contact paper
 keeping everything totally angry
 sanitary
 since how long is this continuous
 for a car the color silver is least good
 i like a favorite subject
 i was just curious if there was anyone else out there
 you scare, despite your fearless head and sour cream
 jam is in a cup
 you set me free
 there was no school i wanted to do
 the sky is a dark wonderful dark
 outside the room is where do you stay at
 i have been listening for hours, you aren't returning
 see you in the hell my dear
 you have a nice set
 you have a nice set up
 i made the wall into part of myself
 i am not from texas
 oooh, sleigh bells
 is this emilie
 what is it called
 hello is this emilie
 i drink water and sleep
 dream about, a plant to become
 /person walking endless in a circle
 incarnate under sunlight
 red
 in fact it is a need that produces a time
 to walk beneath
 to walk thru carnations
 and bear the site of their event
 i lay me down for the tenderness of ankles
 the sounds are difficult to place
 they come so quickly to my ears
 but stay? for ever and ever on right
 it expands

i look for chilled people in the chat
like a scrap, i swim up to the surface
the light was green and very reflective, and i was
i liked it

i rly like the music's modern kick
in practical singing flies the cage apart
the universe is a garage
garbage
rag and gelid shrieks it past
hi
i dislike slosh
to fill the guts you change it very rapidly
order and concentric,
all my evidence you must have been
a fine reference y'all just chill
stop to secure the cargo
belts and belt loops, we're a couple
love and lay my
idek if you remember
reamer, slicer paper pepperoni andino
my biological grade is a b
not even a plus
that's.....so kind

these legs are so long
she has offered to help me make my surfaces
are you sure you don't have a crush on her?
it sounds like y'all are interacting a lot
of the chex mix, let me know if i can be more helpful
clair de lung, yr kind of an expert
at this point

KIRSTEN IHNS is a recent graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and is currently a Ph.D. student and Neubauer Presidential Fellow in English Literature at the University of Chicago, where she studies texts that seem to want to be images, and works on the poetry staff of *Chicago Review*. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Iowa Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, *TAGVVERK*, *The Offing*, *DREGINALD*, *Bennington Review*, *Vinyl*, *BOAAT*, *inter/rupture*, and elsewhere, and her manuscript was a finalist for the 2018 Ahsahta Press Sawtooth Poetry Prize, and the 2018 Cleveland State University First Book Prize. She is from Atlanta, GA.

FROM THE TURKEY HEN

Lucas Bernhardt

One improbable mows the lawn,
another trims the hedges.
Sunlight pours from the forehead
to the ground, where ants as ghosts
enjoined to walk the whole
continuously out of focus
offer one another little
collisions like encouragement.
Forearm across the forehead,
a slow in coming translation.
What equivalence can there be
to the gift turkey
that uncovered the king's armor?
What happened next to the turkey?
Sister informs brother
she defeated him in childhood,
she defended him in childhood.
Brother tells baby brother
just roll with it.
There was a king whose queen
died in childbirth.
There was a king who after
a year of weeping died.
On the forehead appears a cloud.

Can you believe the turkey dug all the way
to a trap door and hidden staircase?
If the science of the day could dramatize
more accurately, elegantly
the royal prerogative
may it blind itself with quicklime
and enjoy an age or two of peace.
Let the holiday trees planted along the border
send their roots down to the sewers
and grow to unimagined heights.
For a time, our grandparents believed
said door lay just beneath the topsoil
of the mind. They took some wild vacations.
Let those be forgotten, else attributed to fate.

The king was buried
to the forehead
in the forest
watching a blade of grass
oppose the ground.
His advisors spoke
in voices of gravel
displaced by hooves.
The horse were coming
as always, and so
the advisors retired.
He lay in the reeds
among geese
in the morning
lifting their bills
to a confusion of breeze.
To the blade arisen
he said *victory for now*.

A halo of distress
he called adumbration
surrounded each tree.

Horsemen arrived
and refreshed their mounts.
Setting fire to the woods,
the king inaccessible
received their thanks.

Being an orphan without knowledge
of her origins, the sister
had an advantage
when, as custom, she exchanged
inquiries into the health
and disposition of the house
in greeting. The woman,
untroubled, asked several
times about her brother.
Some unreality creeps
into our relations
when affirmed, some ants
the built walls and rafters.
From a bag the woman
pulled a turkey, for Christmas.

What's Christmas?

That festival our descendants
sometimes kept, with song
and food and unaccountable
goodwill. Over customary
objections the woman
insisted: *here, take the turkey.*

The flightless bird of youth,

harbor and home of inaction,
the one who tends to fate
with delicious little claws.

How could the sister not love
life for its absurdities;
the sister, to be known
as the sister! And then
beneath the floor in this corner
of their cellar home, the turkey
promptly excavated
a dark well. The lid, once wood,
now gaped blindly to the well bottom,
where rose
a low mound with flat
black terraces. Something
like a colony of ants, all workers,
had fallen from free colonies
above. Unable to return
to their maternal nest, in cold
and total darkness, the rain
of ants kept their discipline,
forming the mound, tending
the entrances, and terracing the dead.
Their numbers were replenished,
increased, when each spring
the nearest colonies swelled.
Gray, black, little strings of movement:
this was the turkey's first revelation.

Alone in the dark room
there were often visitors,
foreign ministers too shy
to speak, merchants untempted to
pause, familiar-seeming children
begging alms
a touch theatrically.

Sometimes after finding
the mat with her toe
and having lain there
who knows how long
the sister would see
a woman seated
daylit above her
reaching toward her
in calm reassurance.
The woman could reach
a long time without touching,
but in contact it was
as if the sister
were a different person.
She would panic a moment,
looking around the room,
wondering what
she had lost, and when
she was touched again,
she would again feel new
and removed from that
brief self already
distantly remembered,
and would panic less
with each ensuing touch
until it was the sun
she saw at the window,
unknowing that she'd passed
through the T-shaped halls
beneath the castle.

So pleased with fate the youth
made vows
and established new routines.
Sweet mornings, savories at
eventide,
and in between
a woman arrives the way a
woman arrives

in a dream, possibly
having stood in the center of the room
unnoticed a long time.
A friend of his mother whose gifts were known
by few in the region, who
with a gesture like permitting a fist of sand
to fall between her fingers
could brush aside the curtain of the moment
and in translation render
the smell of grass in the air as a visual
phantasm. An inscrutable thing
to make the beams and tapestries weep,
to hear the hammer
of the man repairing cobblestones
as though composed
of the fine bones of an ear below the dirt.
Then the air
of the room is hinged, swings open, and
who would dare enter?
To walk up the black hill, billowing
like the fires that speak
from the fuels that they consume,
even here the youth
whose father abandoned fatherhood, whose mother
had no choice,
suspects a kind of pretext of the rush of
countervailing oddities
in an otherwise ordinary day.
Some unhappy soul
is gushing smoke. Why not me?

LUCAS BERNHARDT manages the PSU Writing Center, teaches writing at Oregon College of Art and Craft, and is Poetry Editor at *Propeller Magazine*.

FROM ORACULAR ORGANISM

Charles Gabel

The organism logs its accomplishments into a marketable curriculum. Educational background and publication record should be arranged according to a narrative of inevitability. *This organism will be hired!* says the CV of the organism. The organism graduates from a private institution of moderate prestige in 2009 C.E. In 2012 C.E. the organism graduates from a respectable graduate program housed in a public institution with excellent marketing. The following year, the organism's thesis manuscript is rejected for publication 14 times. After several months of unemployment, the organism receives its first eviction notice. Three poems are accepted for publication in an online journal of moderate prestige.

The organism wails without meter, a sputtering symptom of its stray alphabets. They sag from an abscess without desire or intention, unable to mimic the lyre's contingent figures, the cold voyager's pusillanimous signal. Formal characteristics such as linebreaks and meter become vestigial on the open market. The poem's generic topology sags, a foggy star. It burns between each of the organism's ribs, fighting the elimination of its archaic practice. It may be reactivated, however, through therapeutic procedures as prescribed by a licensed practitioner of the art. The organism's transcripts show a 4.0 GPA. Its diploma reads "The board of trustees by virtue of the authority vested in it by law and upon recommendation of the university faculty does hereby confer upon Charles Edward Gabel the degree of Master of Fine Arts Creative Writing With all the rights and responsibilities pertaining thereto." The organism wails without meter, participating in an outmoded genre with a small but dedicated audience.

The manuscript swells with capital, profitable literary procedures. Step 1: scrape back the text only in oracular motions. This will delineate various tissues, pulling sublimity from interest rates. Step 2: name your gods. This will dictate your influences until no relevant prayer can be found in the arrangement of text. While its cellular composition may not be determined, certain human qualities become apparent, including political symptoms and aesthetic values. The organs bloom in your throat, Charles, but this address finds little solace in gravity's nouns, the uneasy arrangements of its chariots. Infection blooms under text. The poet is a tangle of organs complicated by gravity. The poet is a lyre. The poet is a dead thing, overwhelmed by the vibrations of its music, \$39.50 paid monthly for a High Deductible Health Plan. Capital's slow rite turns solar proxorbital, and the hymn's knotty speech knots among its speaker. Cold voyager, behold my Apollonoid function! The slog of participatory song! The deer's spoiled bloat commands the attention of nouns. Bacteria builds, gains purchase on consciousness as a finite thing, inviting inspection. Count each bacterium and imagine its materials. The materials bloat in discrete interests. The skin flaps back to reveal its subliminal text. I am with you in gravity and in petty flesh, Charles. (I am with you)

CHARLES GABEL was born in 1986 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Other pieces of his manuscript *Oracular Organism* can be found in *New Delta Review*, *Dreginald*, and *The Journal Petra*. Charles co-edits *Coast/No Coast*, a print journal of writing and art, and he lives between Cincinnati and Cádiz, Spain.

TWO POEMS

Sarah Matthes

A PREPOSITION TO FOLLOW “LIVE”

Here I am
in someone else’s bad dream.

Metal spheres roll through the grass,
grow larger, pull iron from the rock
and from the blood.

The wind takes what from me?
No matter. That was never mine

There is
burning.

When I awake the field is made of faces.
Can you remember anything?

Yes.

Though how to put it.

What do you want to know?

The facts? —	The feelings?
That I was there? —	That I was crying?
I held a vase.	I held an urn.
I was a flower.	I was what burned.

If I don’t survive it, please
remember the

right things about me:

The time I was caught singing
among the violins.

Perhaps I lost my bow,
thought no one would notice the difference —

Perhaps
my voice came back
and so I used my voice.

CHERRY BOMB

Everyone keeps dying from nothing
To search their skin for green blood,
you'd find nothing

A thousand girls die each year
choking on cherry stems
they're trying to tie into knots with their tongues

I comb my hair a hundred strokes
and wish my scalp was blue and beautiful

I dream when I dream
of my own thighs

Bare on a soundstage

Of eyes on them
The klieglights and the floodlights and
the spots

The warmth of all those lights and the eyes too

I wake up sweating and hips twice as wide
I decide between smoking and drinking and eating
Which are the three bright red leaves on my tree —

The beautiful ones, and the ones that are dying

Outside I hallucinate a group of girls
Pink and staggering

They clutch wrists as they walk
They form a machine
Delicate as a spider on stilts
I scream at the damp matches

They call me an addict, they laugh
I say fuck you I've seen the way you put on chapstick
They all turn white and reach for their chapsticks

When they let go of each other the machine breaks
Smoke pours from their mouths and they fall down

I know I've made so many many mistakes

SARAH MATTHES is a poet from central New Jersey. Her work has appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *Prodigal*, *The Feminist Utopia Project*, *Girlblood Info*, and elsewhere. She is a Michener Fellow at the University of Texas at Austin.